

THE HOUSE VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Hearing on “Veterans as a Unique Resource to Our Economy”

March 24, 2004, 10:00 A.M.

Statement of Wesley Poriotis

Chairman and co-founder of Veterans Across America

A VETERANS SOCIAL MOVEMENT

“BRANDING” THE VETERAN:

CREATING DEMAND FOR THE VETERAN IN THE WORKFORCE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE, HONORED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

IT’S AN HONOR AND A PRIVILEGE TO APPEAR BEFORE THIS COMMITTEE. I’D LIKE TO THANK CHAIRMAN SMITH AND RANKING MEMBER EVANS FOR THEIR VISION IN CONVENING A GROUP OF TOP BUSINESS EXECUTIVES TO TACKLE THE ISSUE AT HAND. A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL OF YOUR STAFF MEMBERS WHO WORKED SO HARD TO MAKE THIS HEARING A SUCCESS.

WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO IGNITE THE FUSE ON THE FIRST GREAT SOCIAL MOVEMENT OF THE 21ST CENTURY--A VETERANS SOCIAL MOVEMENT.

I’M OLD ENOUGH TO RECALL TWO OF THE GREAT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY--THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT. THESE MOVEMENTS—WHICH TRANSFORMED OUR SOCIETY AND EMPOWERED MILLIONS OF CITIZENS--HAD ONE COMMON DENOMINATOR:

BEFORE EITHER WOMEN OR PEOPLE OF COLOR COULD TAKE THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY--AND COMPETE EQUALLY ON THE PLAYING FIELDS OF BUSINESS AND POLITICS--A MASSIVE ATTITUDINAL CHANGE TOWARD INCLUSIVENESS HAD TO TAKE PLACE--TOWN BY TOWN, COMMUNITY BY COMMUNITY, FAMILY BY FAMILY.

WE MUST NOW UNDERTAKE A THIRD GREAT SOCIETAL CHALLENGE: TO INSURE THAT AMERICA’S VETERANS HAVE THE FULL OPPORTUNITY TO COMPETE FOR QUALITY EMPLOYMENT. AND TO ELIMINATE THE DESELECTIVE

BIAS THAT CONTINUES TO HINDER TRANSITIONING AND FORMER MILITARY FROM COMPETING ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD.

THIS DESELECTIVE BIAS IS SIMILAR TO THAT FACED BY WOMEN AND PEOPLE OF COLOR IN DECADES PAST, AS THEY BATTLED TO GAIN A FOOTHOLD IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE.

THIS BIAS PERSISTS BECAUSE OF THE MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND STEREOTYPES THAT HAVE GROWN UP ABOUT THE VALUE OF MILITARY SERVICE TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR—ESPECIALLY IN THESE LAST THREE POST-VIETNAM DECADES OF A VOLUNTEER MILITARY.

THIS BIAS IGNORES A KEY LESSON OF HISTORY, THAT THE MILITARY IS A GREAT TRAINING GROUND FOR BUSINESS LEADERS.

WORLD WAR II WAS THE CLASSIC EXAMPLE. THE HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL CLASS OF 1949, THE FIRST POST WAR CLASS, PRODUCED 700 NEW MBAs. 91% OF THEM WERE VETERANS. HOW WELL DID THEY DO IN BUSINESS? PRETTY DARN WELL.

A THIRD OF THEM BECAME CEOs, INCLUDING JIM BURKE OF JOHNSON & JOHNSON, TOM MURPHY OF CAPITAL CITIES/ABC, MARVIN TRAUB OF BLOOMINGDALES AND PETER MCCOLOUGH OF XEROX.

IN SPITE OF THIS STELLAR RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT, MORE RECENT GENERATIONS OF VETERANS HAVE NOT HAD NEARLY AS MUCH SUCCESS IN THE WORKFORCE, HAVE NOT RISEN TO LEADERSHIP ROLES IN THE SAME NUMBERS.

THE BAD NEWS IS THAT MILITARY SERVICE HAS BECOME DEVALUED IN THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE.

THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WE AT *VETERANS ACROSS AMERICA* HAVE A SOLUTION TO THIS PROBLEM.

THE AMERICAN SOLDIER HAS BEEN HERALDED BY *TIME* MAGAZINE AS “PERSON OF THE YEAR.” BUT IN CORPORATE AMERICA THAT RESPECT HAS NOT SPREAD WIDELY ENOUGH BEYOND THE REALM OF THE COMPANIES THAT HAVE TRADITIONALLY HIRED MANY VETERANS—THE NATION’S DEFENSE CONTRACTORS.

TWO YEARS AGO I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF TESTIFYING BEFORE THE BENEFITS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THIS BODY, BEFORE CHAIRMAN SIMPSON AND RANKING MEMBER REYES, IN REFERENCE TO THE JOBS FOR VETERANS ACT.

I SAID THEN THAT A KEY TO SUCCESS IN THIS AREA WAS TO
“**AGGRESSIVELY MARKET THE MILITARY TO CORPORATE AMERICA.**”

BUILDING ON THIS CORE IDEA, LAST YEAR WE CONVENED A BRANDING SUMMIT, WHICH BROUGHT TOGETHER SOME OF THE MOST ASTUTE BUSINESS AND CREATIVE MINDS OF OUR TIME.

THEIR CONCLUSION? WE SHOULD **BRAND THE VETERAN AND CREATE A DEMAND** FOR THIS COMPETITIVE RESOURCE AMONG ALL AMERICAN EMPLOYERS.

AFTER ALL, THE ARMED SERVICES SPEND \$600 MILLION ANNUALLY IN MARKETING AND ADVERTISING AS AN ENGINE TO RECRUIT YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN **INTO** THE MILITARY.

TOGETHER, WE MUST BUILD AN EQUALLY POWERFUL ENGINE TO PROPEL THOSE WITH MILITARY SERVICE **INTO** THE AMERICAN WORKFORCE.

“BRANDING” THE VETERAN, LITERALLY RELAUNCHING THE VETERAN AS A VALUABLE RESOURCE (OR PRODUCT) USING CLASSIC CONSUMER ADVERTISING TECHNIQUES, WILL ACCOMPLISH TWO OBJECTIVES:

- BRANDING WILL CREATE THE **PULL** IN THE MARKETPLACE FOR THE VETERAN AND TRANSITIONING MILITARY, BECAUSE THEY WILL BE PERCEIVED AS A VALUABLE AND COMPETITIVE ASSET.
- A BRANDING CAMPAIGN WILL EMPOWER TRANSITIONING MILITARY TO APPROACH THE CAREER MARKETPLACE WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF CONFIDENCE

(ONE WAY TO FURTHER BUILD THE CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM OF TRANSITIONING MILITARY WOULD BE TO INCORPORATE THIS BRANDING CAMPAIGN RIGHT INTO THE ACTIVE MILITARY.)

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM COSTS OF SUCH A BRANDING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN? IT WOULD BE LESS ON AN ANNUAL BASIS THAN WHAT

THE AVERAGE DETROIT AUTOMAKER SPENDS ON THE INTRODUCTION/LAUNCH OF ONE NEW VEHICLE!

A KEY PART OF THE “BRANDING” PLAN IS WHAT I WOULD CALL THE **INFORMATION SOLUTION**. THIS IS THE DIGITAL AGE. WE ALL USE COMPUTERS, DATABASES, E-MAIL SOFTWARE, AND THE INTERNET TO SOLVE PROBLEMS IN OUR BUSINESS AND OUR PERSONAL LIVES.

LET’S USE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP VETERANS COMPETE FOR BETTER JOBS. AND TO HELP COMPANIES TAP THIS VALUABLE RESOURCE.

HERE’S ONE STRIKING STATISTIC. FOUR MILLION. THAT’S HOW MANY VETERANS HAVE TRANSITIONED FROM THE ARMED FORCES SINCE THE END OF THE FIRST GULF WAR. FOUR MILLION. THAT’S A LOT OF TALENT POURING INTO THE WORKFORCE.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT, IN THIS VAUNTED DIGITAL AGE, WHEN WE HAVE VAST AMOUNTS OF DIGITIZED DATA ABOUT EVERYBODY ON THE PLANET, WE DON’T HAVE A CLUE ABOUT WHAT **HAS HAPPENED** TO THESE FOUR MILLION VETERANS.

HERE IS WHAT WE **DO** KNOW ABOUT THEM, BASED ON EXHAUSTIVE DATA COMPILED **BEFORE** THEY EXITED THE MILITARY.

- 42% OF THESE VETERANS, 1.6 MILLION, LEFT THE SERVICE WHEN THEY WERE BETWEEN **20 AND 24** YEARS OF AGE; 75% OF THEM TRANSITIONED WHEN THEY WERE UNDER THE AGE OF 34.
- MORE THAN 334,000 OF THEM HAVE SPECIFIC TRAINING IN THE AREA OF **COMMUNICATIONS AND INTELLIGENCE**.
- MORE THAN 219,000 OF THEM HAVE **HEALTH CARE** TRAINING
- THEY’RE HIGHLY EDUCATED: MORE THAN 35,000 HOLD PHDs; 108,000 HOLD MAs OR MSs; 254,000 HOLD BAs OR BSs; AND AN IMPRESSIVE 3.4 MILLION OF THE 4.1 MILLION HAVE AT LEAST A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE.
- LOOKING FOR MINORITY TALENT? WELL, 25% ARE BLACK OR HISPANIC.

BUT WE KNOW NEXT TO NOTHING ABOUT HOW THEY HAVE USED THEIR SKILLS AND EDUCATION, BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T TRACK THEM.

THAT'S TOO BAD. BECAUSE THESE FOUR MILLION REPRESENT AN EMPLOYMENT "NETWORK" FOR OTHER VETERANS TRANSITIONING EVERY DAY.

BUT WE CAN'T TAP THAT NETWORK BECAUSE WE DON'T KNOW WHERE THESE VETERANS HAVE LANDED AND WHAT THEY'RE DOING.

BY CONTRAST, THINK OF THE MILLIONS OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE GRADUATED FROM AMERICA'S COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SINCE 1990. WE KNOW A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT ABOUT WHERE THEY ARE BECAUSE COLLEGES TRACK THE PROGRESS OF THEIR ALUMNI/AE WITH GREAT CARE. AND NOT JUST FOR FUND-RAISING PURPOSES. BECAUSE GRADUATES FROM EARLIER YEARS REPRESENT A VITAL EMPLOYMENT NETWORK FOR NEWER GRADUATES.

LET'S TAKE A PAGE FROM THE PLAYBOOK OF AMERICAN COLLEGES. LET'S TRACK THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF OUR TRANSITIONING MILITARY—THE MILITARY'S VERSION OF COLLEGE ALUMNI.

LET'S TAP THIS NETWORK TO HELP OUR NEWEST MILITARY "GRADUATES" FIND THEIR PLACE IN THE WORKFORCE.

WITH THE HELP OF FORBES MAGAZINE, *VETERANS ACROSS AMERICA* HAS IDENTIFIED ABOUT 40 CEOs OF AMERICAN COMPANIES WHO ARE VETERANS. BUT WHY STOP THERE? LET'S IDENTIFY **ALL** OF THE CEOs WHO ARE VETERANS, INCLUDING THOSE AMONG THE FOUR MILLION.

LET'S ALSO DEVELOP SOME PERFORMANCE METRICS ABOUT VETERANS. AFTER ALL, WE SPEND \$17 BILLION A YEAR OF TAXPAYER MONEY TO TRAIN THE MEMBERS OF OUR ARMED FORCES.

AS WITH ANY INVESTMENT, WE SHOULD BE SEEKING TO ACHIEVE THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE ROI, RETURN ON INVESTMENT.

AND HOW DO WE MEASURE OUR RETURN? ONE CRITICAL WAY IS TO FIND OUT HOW SUCCESSFULLY OUR VETERANS AND TRANSITIONING VETERANS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INTEGRATE THEMSELVES INTO THE AMERICAN ECONOMY.

IN TERMS OF THE ROI ON THE \$17 BILLION, WOULDN'T IT BE USEFUL TO SPEND A LITTLE MORE MONEY TO FIND OUT HOW EFFECTIVE THIS TRAINING

HAS BEEN IN PREPARING VETERANS TO PERFORM IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR,
WHERE THE VAST MAJORITY WILL WIND UP?

MANY COMPANIES SAY THEY WOULD LOVE TO HIRE MORE VETERANS
BUT THEY HAVE TROUBLE FINDING THEM, HAVE TROUBLE CONNECTING WITH
THOSE WHO HAVE THE SKILLS AND TALENTS NEEDED FOR SPECIFIC JOBS.

WOULDN'T IT BE VALUABLE TO HAVE A **SOFTWARE AND SUPPLY CHAIN
ENGINE** THAT COULD LINK THE SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS OF REAL LIFE JOBS
THAT COMPANIES ARE TRYING TO FILL EVERY DAY—COMPANIES LIKE THOSE
TESTIFYING HERE TODAY—WITH THE SPECIFIC SKILLS AND TALENTS THAT
MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES HAVE LEARNED IN THE MILITARY? THE SO-
CALLED **MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS**, OR MOSs.

USING SUCH A SOFTWARE ENGINE, A COMPANY COULD PLUG IN THE JOBS
IT NEEDS TO FILL—SAY, TRUCK DRIVER OR COMPUTER EXPERT OR VP OF SALES
OR AUDITOR OR WAREHOUSE LOGISTICS CHIEF—AND IN SECONDS THE
SOFTWARE WOULD PROVIDE A LIST OF ALL THE AVAILABLE VETERANS WITH
THOSE EXACT SKILLS.

AS PART OF OUR PROPOSED SOLUTION, **VETERANS ACROSS AMERICA** IS
BUILDING THIS VERY SOFTWARE, IN CONJUNCTION WITH PEOPLESOFT, INC.

THIS SOLUTION CAN SUCCEED **NOW** BECAUSE WE ARE AT A WATERSHED
MOMENT, WHEN THERE IS A POWERFUL AND POSITIVE CONNECTION BETWEEN
THE AMERICAN PEOPLE AND OUR MILITARY.

I'LL CONCLUDE BY STRESSING A FEW FINAL POINTS.

WE MUST STAY PASSIONATE ABOUT OUR MISSION. AS STATED, IT IS A
MOVEMENT...A VETERANS SOCIAL MOVEMENT.

AND WE MUST STAY THE COURSE ON THE BIG IDEA.

LET'S "**BRAND**" THE AMERICAN VETERAN.

SO THAT AMERICAN EMPLOYERS BECOME FULLY AWARE OF THE VALUE
OF THIS RESOURCE.

AND SO THAT AMERICAN COMPANIES WILL COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER
TO ATTAIN THIS VALUABLE ASSET.

LET'S DEPLOY ALL OF THE POWERFUL TOOLS OF THE DIGITAL AGE—
SOFTWARE, DATABASES, THE INTERNET—TO CREATE A **NETWORK** OF
VETERANS WHO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN AMERICAN BUSINESS.

FINALLY, TO ACHIEVE THESE GOALS, WE NEED SUFFICIENT RESOURCES—
FINANCIAL, DIGITAL, HUMAN. I CALL UPON THE MEMBERS OF THIS
COMMITTEE, AND THE CORPORATE AND POLITICAL TALENT IN THIS ROOM,
TO BAND TOGETHER IN A PARTNERSHIP TO PROVIDE THESE RESOURCES..

THIS PARTNERSHIP SHOULD BE DEDICATED TO INSURING THAT ALL OF
THOSE VETERANS WHO HAVE SERVED THIS COUNTRY OVER THE GENERATIONS
CAN CONTINUE THEIR SERVICE TO NATION AFTER THEY LEAVE THE MILITARY.

WITH YOUR HELP, VETERANS WILL FIND THEIR RIGHTFUL PLACE IN
AMERICAN SOCIETY. AND OUR COUNTRY WILL FINALLY REAP THE HARVEST OF
THE ABUNDANT SKILLS AND TALENT THAT VETERANS HAVE GAINED IN
SERVING THEIR COUNTRY.

THANK YOU.